LAUREN (*slightly louder*). Alexa, pretty please, play Sam's dinner-party playlist.

ALEXA. Okay.

Music comes on – it's Portishead.

SAM. Jenny's done something to her whilst / I was away…

LAUREN (*re: music*). This tune takes me back. Your uni bedsit. Spliffs and Tesco cava.

SAM. It was my seduction soundtrack. I'd bang this on and get my telescope out.

BEN. Oh yeah?

SAM. The two things no woman can resist – Portishead and an in-depth discussion of the solar system.

LAUREN *laughs*. JENNY *comes back in*.

JENNY. The window was open.

SAM. What?

JENNY. It was still open.

SAM. Well I… Is the sash broken?

JENNY. No.

SAM. It must be.

LAUREN (*re: food*). This is so good.

JENNY *sits, tension crackling*. LAUREN *and* BEN *eat*. SAM *and* JENNY *don't*.

BEN (*remembering*). Sam… do you know why asparagus makes your pee smell?

SAM (*distracted*). What?

BEN *holds up a piece of asparagus on his fork*.

It contains a sulphurous compound. When your digestive system breaks it down, it releases / a smell.

JENNY (*blurts out, forcefully*). It's her room!

She puts her cutlery down with a clang. LAUREN *and* BEN *look at her, surprised*.

BEN. Are you okay?

SAM. It's nothing.

(*Off her upset look*.) Really? You want to do this?

(*Sighs, to the others*.) I didn't want to tell you, but… we seem to have a ghost.

Beat, then he laughs. LAUREN *laughs*. JENNY *and* BEN *do not*.

Seriously, I've come home to find the house is haunted.

JENNY. When you say 'haunted', it makes it sound like it's not…

SAM. What?

JENNY. Real.

LAUREN. Sorry? You're not joking? This is actually a thing?

SAM. No…

(*Off* JENNY*'s look*.) Oh come on!

(*Laughs; then*.) I've been away. Jen's been sitting here, new house, in the dark… And Phoebe – she's pretty creepy.

(*Off their looks*.) All babies are. In the nicest possible way. Staring at things that aren't there. Babbling to themselves. / Projectile vomiting.

JENNY. I think I hear a ghost.

LAUREN *freezes, reaching for parmesan*.

LAUREN. Now I really want to know.

SAM. Sweetie, you're going to / look mad.

LAUREN. Alexa, turn the music off.

ALEXA. Okay.

The music stops.

SAM. Oy!

LAUREN. I think most of us, if we were scared enough, would run off, leave our loved ones to be eaten.

JENNY. That isn't true. I'd never leave Phoebe.

This hangs in the air for a moment. The kettle clicks off.

LAUREN. When I was young, my parents would drive us out to visit these ghost towns that'd been left behind after the gold rush. Old wooden houses and saloon bars, exactly like they were when the gold ran out.

JENNY *pours the water into the cafetière.*

My brother and I used to run around the shacks, chatting to phantom forty-niners. As a kid, I just assumed ghosts were real.

JENNY. But have you ever seen one?

Beat.

LAUREN. Something happened to me once… that didn't make sense.

JENNY. Go on…

LAUREN. I was thirteen, and there was a girl in my class. Ida. I loved her… I was probably a bit 'in love' with her. She had this awesome shock of red hair that defied gravity. And she was so beautiful, and clever. We'd sit in her bedroom, listen to Nirvana.

JENNY. / Course!

She starts to plunge the cafetière.

LAUREN. We'd chat for hours. And she kept parakeets.

JENNY. Really?

LAUREN. They'd fly round her room, and she was training them to talk.

JENNY *laughs.*

She was kooky. We lived in this small, dull jock-town and she was the only person I felt understood me. But she was unhappy. She didn't like her stepdad. She wanted to find her biological father. He lived somewhere in Arizona. And then, one Saturday, I came home from the mall, and my parents told me that Ida was dead.

JENNY. Bloody hell.

LAUREN. She'd fallen from her bedroom window, onto the street.

JENNY (*shocked*). How?

She pours the coffee.

LAUREN. People thought her stepdad had pushed her, but at the inquest, it came out he wasn't even in the house. She'd been alone.

JENNY. / So...?

LAUREN. The most likely theory was one of her parakeets had flown out the window and Ida had tried to catch it. I was heartbroken.

JENNY. And afterwards, you saw her again?

She hands LAUREN *a coffee.*

LAUREN. No... that I'd have understood. But it was before I heard.

(*Off* JENNY*'s confused look.*) That afternoon. I saw her at the mall. She was in one of the glass elevators, going up, her hair like this beautiful explosion, and she smiled and waved to me. Only she died in the morning. She must have been dead for hours by then.

JENNY. Have you told many people?

LAUREN. Just one other. It seemed too crazy, you know?

JENNY. Yes! Except it was the opposite. I thought I'd go mad if I didn't tell anyone.

LAUREN. But maybe you don't have to be afraid. For years after Ida died – at night, I'd hear parakeets...

JENNY. That's creepy.

LAUREN. No. I found it comforting. Ghosts... fill the gaps. Your Margaret – maybe that table and the tools aren't the only thing she left behind.

JENNY (*hardly daring to say it out loud*). Frank...?